

PIPA Selling Jewels of The Sky Worldwide - by Silvio Mattacchione

When I first heard a friend, Dave, mention “PIPA” the first image that entered my mind was that of a pipeline. Why, you might rightfully ask? Well since my heritage is Italian this word for me had a totally different imagery that it might have for others who are non Italian. In English the Italian word “pipa” is translated as “pipe” and it is the skillful placement of this pipe that makes up a dedicated “pipeline” that is used to transport commodities, most often oil. In the oil industry “pipeline “ operators are a specialized, highly qualified, a unique group of entrepreneurs and professionals that are indispensable for getting oil (often called black gold) to market.

Pipa was, it turns out, not just a random word in a conversation that I was having but rather a unique European commercial enterprise. Though I had never heard of it prior to this conversation, I was quickly to find out that the “Pipe” I now refer to was not in the business of transporting oil, it was in fact in the business of transporting something much more valuable than oil, much more unique than oil, something that has fascinated man for thousands of years, and oddly enough something that is living and has been part of my life for at least 40 years. The unique product that “Pipa” deals in is in fact, the modern racing pigeon!



Thomas, Carlo, Martin Degrave and Nikolaas.

Well at this point I felt rather silly, how could I have been so involved in racing pigeons without ever realizing that “PIPA” had over the period of nine brief years become the major player in the marketing of racing pigeons worldwide?

There may be many others across Canada and the USA, who, like myself would innocently ask who or, what is PIPA? Well , it turns out that, what is now know worldwide as “PIPA” is a hugely successful commercial enterprise that began in Belgium in 1999 as a young boys fascination with two very different pursuits, the first was the centuries old sport of racing pigeons and the second the emerging internet technology. At the time the Internet was little know and generally speaking, (for the average man) little used. Nikolaas started a website called Pigeon Paradise that was a

fascinating hobby that he thought could be used to collect information, to inform, to record all things relating to the sport of racing pigeons. Now I am sure that if Nikolaas (an economics student at the University of Ghent) had had, eventually, informed his University Professors of his desire to wed economic aspirations with pigeons and the internet they would probably have had quite a chuckle. But nine years later with Nikolaas heading up an ever growing, highly successful, multi million dollar, commercial enterprise that services the needs of pigeon fanciers worldwide no one is laughing. Given the joke that has now become “Wall Street” I am sure that the former classmates of Nikolaas would now concede that he had a brilliant idea that was executed with equal brilliance! “PIPA” or officially Pigeon Paradise BVBA, the brainchild of a young Belgian (only 20 years old at the time) Nikolaas Gyselbrecht can be found at www.pipa.be



Nikolaas on his computer.

Now clearly what began as an informational site in 1999 mutated into a commercial venture by 2003 once Nikolaas and brother Thomas were able to dedicate their full time to this enterprise. But one needs to ask, why did these young brothers succeed when so many other pigeon internet auctions sites barely pay their bandwidth fees? Herein lays the “rest of the story”!

As a writer we always understood that “you write about what you know”! This is exceedingly important advice for anyone in any field. Well it turns out that Nikolaas and his brother Thomas had been brought up with world class racing pigeons almost from birth. The father of Nikolaas is a dedicated pigeon veterinarian Dr. Carlo Gyselbrecht and as such he has been dedicated to developing both the very best lines as well as the most up to date and effective “health protocols”. Really it is a conceptually simple formula, that is, however, almost impossible to achieve, long term, in practice and that is “world class pigeons maintained under a health regime that promotes super health and ultimately super results”. Dr. Gyselbrecht by 1995 achieved what most fanciers world wide can only dream of and that is 1st International Barcelona. He would also raise 2nd National Barcelona as well as 4th National Barcelona. Clearly the “Gyselbrecht strain” (The Gyselbrecht strain for the extreme long distance is a unique combination of Vanbruaene, Van der Wegen and Brouckaert) or family of pigeons is a breeding treasure (Actually the most important pigeon for the Gyselbrecht family is still their 1st international Barcelona winner, who is still alive, his name is Laureaat Barcelona, but he is 17 years old.) that is very low key for the time being.

One can easily imagine the pigeon conversations that would have taken place at the Gyselbrecht household every day. The knowledge that would have been imparted to these young brothers, while growing up, would certainly have given them an incredible head start that would take most fanciers a lifetime of trial and error to achieve.

So PiPa was started by a young man who had developed a love of pigeons that was honestly come by. After all, not only was the father of Nikolaas a dedicated racing pigeon professional, who loved and raised racing pigeons but so were his grandfathers on both sides as well as a great grandfather and two uncles. It is really quite incredible to contemplate the dedication of so many generations of one family to the sport of racing pigeons. Nikolaas, Thomas and father Carlo race in partnership, but they race under the name of Nikolaas, and in Hamme-Mille (French Belgium) they race together with Martin Degrave as Degrave-Gyselbrecht. Thomas also races with his father Carlo as "Gyselbrecht & Thomas". Martin Degrave is the one who was the first partner of Nikolaas to start PiPa in 2001. So from 1999 to 2001 Nikolaas was alone, then in 2004 Thomas joined and from the beginning Dr. Carlo always supported the project and got full time professionally involved since about 2004 also. Now he does not practice his veterinary practice any more.

Well we have accounted for one component necessary to success and that is in-depth knowledge of ones field and clearly the founders of PIPA have this in spades! The second plank necessary for success is being at the "right place at the right time". Well if anyone was ever to choose the right place for a successful pigeon enterprise it would certainly be in Europe and more specifically Belgium. After all the racing pigeon as a "breed" was developed in Belgium.

Several years ago I traced the heritage of the modern racing pigeon (<http://www.silvio-co.com/pigeons/strains.htm>) and wrote the following:

"The most successful modern racing pigeons were developped in Belgium. This development began in approximately 1810, and by 1868, W.B. Tegetmeier in his Pigeons: Their Structure, Varieties, Habits, and Management could write: "From the fact that many of the breed come from Antwerp, they are not infrequently known as Antwerp's or Antwerp's Carriers. In rapidity and power of flying these birds far exceed any other variety of pigeon with which I am acquainted. This power of flight is conjoined with an attachment to home that is not surpassed by that of any other pigeon".

In time, these Antwerp carriers, as well as the short-faced pigeons of the province of Liege, were crossed.

The homing pigeon of Belgium is the result of the crossing of the Cumulet of Antwerp with the Smerle of Liege. The Cumulet was described by Mr. Andre Coopers, secretary of one of the Belgium Societies in 1868, as being of Flemish origin with white eyes, and having a habit of flying so high that it was gone from sight for several hours. The Smerle, he advises, is of Wallon origin, with a short beak and having several recurved feathers on its neck. It did not fly as high or as long as the Cumulet, but it was much more rapid. Finally, in Belgium, the Bec-Anglais (Dragoons) were also crossed, and so these three varieties formed the basis for the appearance of the better-built, stronger, faster, and more precisely cultivated homing instinct of the modern form of homing pigeon."



Visit from Japan, to check the quality of the PiPa Quarantaine facilities. They were impressed !

So clearly Belgium, Holland, Germany is without a doubt the epi-center of the entire pigeon world. The world still looks to this “cradle” of the racing pigeon sport as its continued source for ever better performance pigeons. Serious racing here is truly a way of life. This fact has been true for almost 200 years and it will no doubt continue to be true for a very long time to come. The third key to success is starting an enterprise at the “right time” and in this case the timing of Nikolaas in starting PIPA was perfect. Without the advent of the World Wide Web the creation of an organization like PIPA would have been impossible. The development of the internet coincided with the advent of the decade of the 90’s. No one could have expected the revolution in the deliverance of information that the internet would quickly enable. Never before in history was so much information collected, uploaded, distributed and viewed worldwide so instantaneously and viewed by so many people in so many nations and all at the same time. In fact the internet changed our way of life so dramatically that most of the older established forms of collecting and distributing information may not survive this century. The racing pigeon sport worldwide has always seen itself as a fraternity of like minded individuals regardless of race, creed, political affiliation, age or gender. The internet consolidated that concept and catapulted certain fanciers and lines to worldwide pigeon notoriety. The common bond that brought all pigeon fanciers together as a community was our love of racing pigeons and the medium that made this all instantly possible was the internet.



After the public auction of Frans Sablon. Auctioneer Martin Martens on the left and coordinator of the public auctions for PiPa Vincent van der Kerk on the right.

Prior to the advent of the internet only certain really connected people had access to top pigeons .These agents created reputations and sought to develop distribution in many countries including the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK, Taiwan and last but not least China. It was not always the case that the best fanciers and the best birds were the best known. The internet has changed all of this. Now within minutes fanciers in America can view on line the real time results of races like the “Sun City Million” in Africa or the “Barcelona International Winner” in Europe, the “Arona Derby” winner in Tenerife or the “World Ace Challenge” in the USA or the “Empire Classic “ in Canada from the comfort of their own living rooms. The internet truly has brought to fruition the idea of a “Global Village”

So Nikolaas and his brother Thomas were at the right place (Belgium) at the “right time” (advent of the internet) and they had the “right background” to make a success of this unique enterprises but they needed more. They needed honesty, integrity and credibility as well. In fact without these last three attributes the long term success of their new enterprise could never have come to pass. Well Nikolaas is a firm believer in “treating other people the way you yourself wish to be treated” so Pipa has placed great emphasis on drawing to itself very strong, highly experienced personnel who are encouraged and empowered to do their jobs remarkably well. So it turns out that young Nikolass has scoured the pigeon world for people who had unrivaled expertise in their fields. In fact this is the PIPA difference! Quality employees with cutting edge expertise, keen sense of integrity and a commitment to very hard work. This PIPA team undertakes and supports every PIPA auction, every PIPA commitment, and every PIPA obligation. Nothing is left to chance.



This is how PIPA was able to evolve from a hobby oriented “informational site” to a “unique commercial enterprises” involved in auctioning pigeons. Not just any pigeons mind you but exclusive, highly sought after performance pigeons from the greatest racing pigeon fanciers in Europe. No small task I assure you! Yet in 2003 this opportunity was to present itself, on a very small scale. That small auction sale really started the “ball” rolling and it has been rolling and growing ever since. Pipa grew rapidly by “word of mouth”. The sellers were happy, the buyers were delighted and one auction lead to another, always moving from strength to strength. Pipa now employs 12 full time staff (including two full time programmers who work exclusively on the PIPA website) and has a network of agents and representatives in every important racing pigeon market worldwide effectively bring the count up to 50 people all working together behind the scenes to make PIPA the success that it has become.

From 2003 until 2009 Nikolaas has pursued his one real strategy and that was to provide to racing pigeon

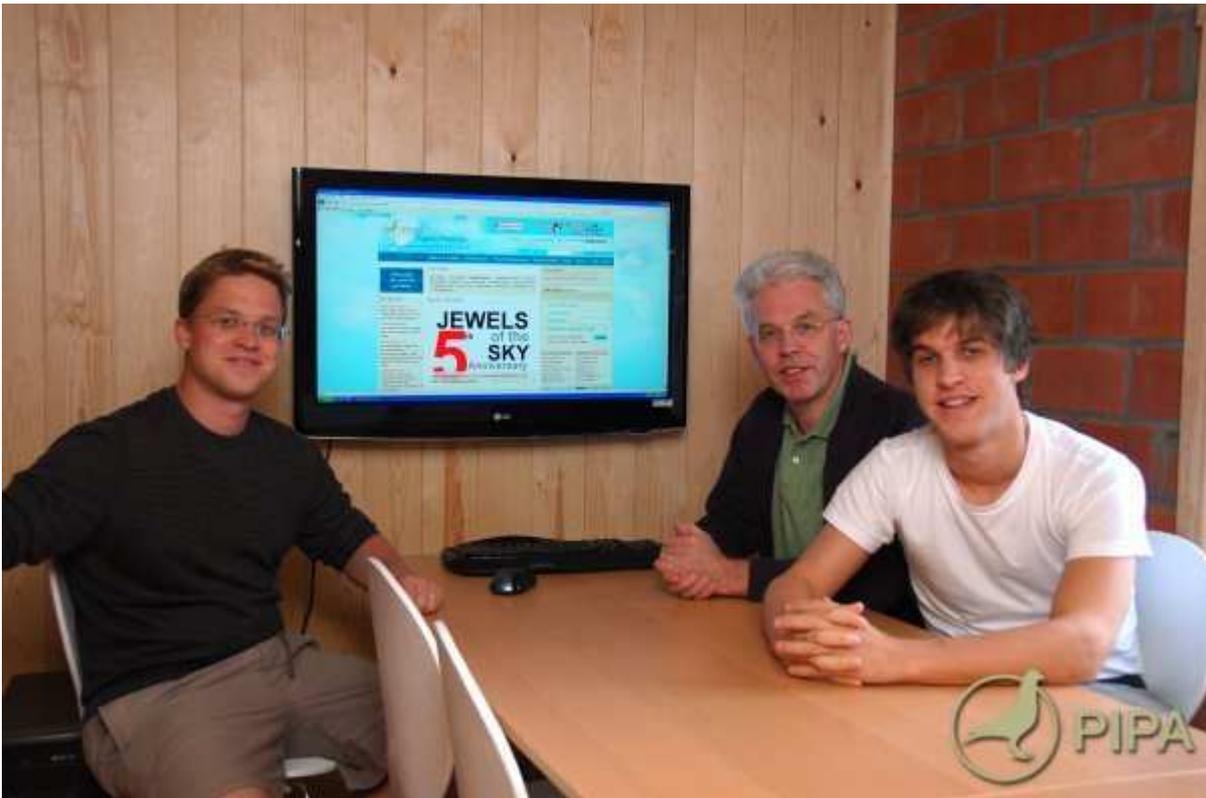
fanciers worldwide the opportunity to bid on and purchase the most exclusive pigeons in the world. What does this mean in practical terms? Well let me put it to you like this PIPA refuses to auction 99.9% of the pigeons that they are approached to auction. Nikolaas and PIPA only undertake to auction the quality of pigeon that they themselves would wish to purchase. With agents across the racing pigeon world doing their homework the potential auctions are well researched, literature is accurate, highly informative and in full color. The most important buyers in the world are well aware of all important upcoming auctions. China is now without a doubt the most important customer for High Quality performance racing pigeons in the world and PIPA is their most trusted source.

The “Mission Statement” of Pipa is very clear and quite unique. PIPA is dedicated to promoting the Belgian-Dutch-German pigeon sport as the “cradle of the racing pigeon sport”. PIPA is dedicated to delivering in a timely fashion detailed and accurate information on the pigeon sport in these three countries. Pipa is dedicated to selling the highest quality pigeons in the world. Pigeons that will help PIPA customers win in their own countries.



Some of the PiPa lofts, with pigeons in transit, to be transported worldwide. PiPa has customers all over the world.

Nikolaas is not interested in selling pigeons he is only interested in selling the “very best pigeons in the world”. Has this young man achieved his goal! I would say “YES” beyond even his wildest dreams and only one example need be given to verify that indeed Nikolaas and his brother Thomas and their company PIPA sells only what can rightly be called the “JEWELS OF THE SKY”! In 2009 the headlines around the pigeon world reported in bold headlines how the internet auction of Ludo Claessens of Putte Holland demolished all previous auction records. When the sale was over 105 pigeons had averaged €8,623.00 each for a grandtotal of €905,450.00 and with the high selling pigeon bringing €110,000.00 without a doubt this PPA auction smashed all previous records and the PIPA team made it all possible!



Nikolaas, Carlo and Thomas in the new meeting room with flat screen television, also for video conferences.

I think it safe to say that these two brothers Nikolaas and Thomas (supported by their father) have changed, via the creation of “PIPA”, the face of pigeon merchandising worldwide. They have helped create an industry that now looks to the entire world as its customers. Yes they have successfully created a “pipeline” that supplies its clients with the most outstanding racing pigeons available today. They did it with courage, foresight, expertise, honesty, credibility and youthful vision. Their act will be very hard to follow and without a doubt they and their enterprise “PIPA” has now officially become the center of the racing pigeon world with an ever increasing responsibility to source for and provide their clients worldwide with ever more brilliant and ever more perfect “living Jewels of the Sky”. If you are after the very best in the world and price is not an object then you are only one “click” away from fulfilling your dreams by visiting www.pipa.be !



PiPa organises network events for pigeon fanciers in Europe, every first monday of the month. On the picture above Kris Cleirbaut, Joost De Smeyter (De Smeyter-Restiaen), Michel Desbuquouis and Geert De Clercq. Also Miss East Flanders 2009 (and possible future Miss Belgium) was present, see picture below. Next time, former Miss Belgium, Virginie Claes will be present.

